

# ASK THE TRAINER

## FINDING A GREAT VETERINARIAN

*I recently adopted a dog from a shelter, and now I have to find a veterinarian. What questions should I ask when calling to interview a Vet. Besides, "Are you available for emergencies?", and "How much do you charge?". Any advice on choosing the right vet will be helpful.*

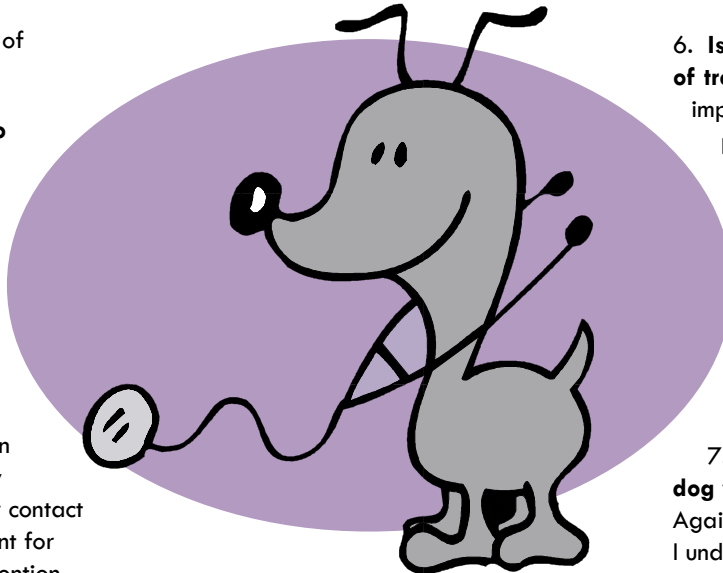
**-Desperately Seeking Veterinarian**

Dear Desperately Seeking,

When selecting a vet, there are a lot of things to consider.

1. **Is the vet's location convenient to you?** If actually getting to the vet's office is a hassle for you, then you are less likely to seek help...even when you really need to.
2. **Is the vet available for phone consultations?** Will they try and assess whether a situation requires immediate attention or if there are more conservative measures which can be tried first. This kind of availability encourages you to have more regular contact with your vet and not put off treatment for things which may need immediate attention. It will also help you save money on those situations which do not require veterinary attention but can be treated by home remedies.
3. **Does the vet hear you and pay attention to what you are saying?** You want a vet who respects you as an owner, your ability to observe your dog's behaviors, and your knowledge of what is normal for your dog. If not, they may miss important information about what is going on with your dog.
4. **Does the vet share the same general approach as you do, in terms of conservative treatment or a no-holds-barred approach?** Some veterinarians approach problems conservatively, taking sort of a minimalist approach to treatment, others believe you treat everything, and

others are somewhere in between. A good example of this is with respect to kennel cough. Many veterinarians believe you just let kennel cough run its course, sort of like a cold in humans. Others believe you should treat with antibiotics or treat the symptoms with a cough medicine, like Robitussin, but don't treat the underlying ailment. You want to find a veterinarian who has a similar approach to treatment as you do.



Dr. Myrna Milani describes the difference as follows:

- A. *Dr. Green performs a quick examination and gets only the most superficial history from the client, then focuses all of her attention on a flurry of intensive diagnostic and treatment procedures.*
- B. *Dr. Green spends a half hour getting a detailed history from the owner and conducting an in-depth physical examination. At the end of that time she orders a specific battery of tests to confirm what she suspects based on this information, and selects her treatment after further discussion with the owner.*

[www.mmilani.com/veterinary\\_minimalism.html](http://www.mmilani.com/veterinary_minimalism.html)

One of these approaches is more likely to

appeal to you, and you want to find a vet who has a similar approach, otherwise you will constantly be frustrated.

5. **Is your vet open to consulting with other veterinarians and specialists?** Just as with medical doctors, there are veterinarian specialists and general practitioners. It is helpful if your vet is open to consulting with other veterinarians, understands his or her own limitations and has good professional resources available if they need help either in diagnosing or treating a problem.

6. **Is your vet open to alternate modalities of treatment?** This may or may not be important to you, depending on your personal inclinations. I personally think it's important, as it opens up additional avenues of diagnosis and treatment. I think both traditional Chinese medicine and Western medicine have advantages, and I would like a vet who won't dismiss one as rubbish and insist only their methods and modalities are valid.

7. **Will your vet let you stay with your dog while he or she is being examined?** Again, this is a personal preference of mine. I understand that many people actually make their dog's behavior worse at the vet's office and that can present difficulties for veterinarians. I know, however, that I don't create that situation for my dogs. I also know that there are vets (hopefully few and far between) who will do things to dogs outside the owner's presence that I would not allow anyone to do to my dog.

8. **Does the vet have a good bedside manner?** Is your dog comfortable with the vet? If not, every time you go will be a struggle for you and highly stressful for your dog. Also, another consideration if you have a larger dog, will the vet insist on the dog getting upon the examining table rather than getting down to their level for a routine examination, for shots or for a blood draw.

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**9. Is your vet willing to listen to your input?** Because I'm a big geek, I frequently will spend time researching canine medical

issues. I don't expect my vet to have found all the latest information on a topic or condition. I do, however, expect her to read the information I have gathered and talk to me about why she thinks it applies or doesn't.

**10. Are you comfortable talking to the vet and do you understand them?** Ideally, you will have a relationship with your vet that you are comfortable telling them exactly what is going on with your dog. You don't want to have to worrying that they will treat you as though you are stupid or a bad person because of whatever is going on with your dog. You also want to make sure the vet speaks in a way you understand. Whether it is talking about diagnostic possibilities, treatment options or routine care you want to be sure you understand all

your vet's suggestions and the reasons for those suggestions, so you can make the best decisions possible for your dog.

**11. Are the facilities clean?** This may sound basic, but any veterinarian's office you go in to should be clean and should not smell. Ask for a tour of the facilities, including the boarding area. Would you be comfortable leaving your dog there if you had to in an emergency?



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For a listing of veterinarians in your area, visit:

**[www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org)**

For a listing of holistic veterinarians, including veterinary chiropractors and acupuncturists, visit:

**[www.ahvma.org](http://www.ahvma.org)**



Clio

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